

ANIMAL CRACKERS

Only a year after their first ever UK visit, **Pixies** are a Top Ten albums band! **Keith Cameron** joins their tour in Brighton to find out about 'Doolittle', and watch them deal with the hangers-on. **Ian T Tilton** gets crabby

OH NO — it's Pete Wylie!
"Eh, awright there Charlie boy. OK if I have a drink? Yeah!"

Backstage at Brighton's Top Rank, the Pixies' dressing-room proves just big enough for both Charles ("Charlie boy") Francis, their ever expansive frontman, and Wylie, professional scouser and ligger supremo, who was once able to boast membership of a band called The Crucial Three.

Such irony was not lost on Pixies, aka The Crucial Four.

Guitarist Joey Santiago promptly emptied his stomach contents on safely returning to the hotel. Meanwhile, style guru and drummer David Lovering was quietly happy in the knowledge that he was the more crucially attired of the two.

As for bassist Kim Deal, a woman who halts London taxis with her shins ("You wanna see my bruise? Pretty, huh?"), ordeal by Wylie was just another occupational hazard, another life in the day of a Pixie.



ABOVE: CHARLES and friend

RIGHT: KIM in front of (L-R) David, Charles, Joey

EVERYONE WANTS to talk to Pixies.

Two dates into their extensive current tour, word arrives that Pixies latest album, 'Doolittle', has claimed a midweek chart placing of number five. Four days into the tour and the official Gallup Top 40 has the album placed at eight.

Not surprisingly, everyone goes mental, with champagne downed and parents telephoned.

It's an incredible achievement for the band who only a year ago arrived on their first UK visit as a support act for 4AD labelmates Throwing Muses.

The swiftness of the band's ascent might be causing a little anxiety at their record company — whose most successful act remains the Cocteau Twins — but Pixies remain disarmingly unconcerned about their impending fame.

"We're still playful," insists Charles.

"We're not even that good," is Joey's opinion.

To diffuse the torrent of superlatives habitual since 1987's 'Come On Pilgrim' debut, Pixies play the young, intelligent East Coasters who could talk you into the ground about art and literature but would rather not because they just wanna rock — pure and simple.

Pure and simple Pixies rock means never having to say exactly what you are or what you mean because rock that pure, that simple — as 'Doolittle' and its predecessor 'Surfer Rosa' — speaks for itself in its elemental, intuitive tongue.

While Sonic Youth articulate a Technicolor confusion through their lengthy guitar trips, Pixies depict a world of black and white certainty, as base and extreme as sex and death — themes that concern the songs on 'Doolittle' as much as before. 'Tame' has the dark eroticism of 'Gigantic' compressed into less than two minutes of screams and gasps.

Pixies rock and roll — like the best, purest rock and roll — is a triumph of body over mind, even though on 'Doolittle' some songs are less abstract than before — notably 'Debaser', based on the Bunuel/Dali cut-up technique in the 1928 surrealist filmic nasty *Un Chien Andalou*.

"I used to be so careful about not putting anything in the song that would somehow make it dated or attach it to a particular country or time-period," says Charles. "Or specific subjects like a movie. But it's not like any movie. I mean, even 'un chien andalusia', you've gotta f***in' know that movie to get what the song is about at all."

Was that film a particular favourite of yours?

"Yeah, I liked it when I saw it but it has more to do with coming up with a line that sounds good. It was either going to be 'un chien andalusia' or 'I want you to shed, Apollonia'. So I couldn't sing about stripping Apollonia 6, that was just too silly — although I like the idea! It was too tongue in cheek, too like an inside joke. It had to be at least a little more broad than that."

"You have the shape of the words long before you have the actual words, always. You have the poetic structure before you have the words. You might have one word, a phrase, no topics or ideas but you have a chord progression. That totally decides how long the lines are and how many syllables. It's good for me, I don't like to write about topics. If a topic comes out of it, fine, but it's more important to think about the structure of the lyrics."

THE BODY over the mind. In Pixies songs physicality is everything, which accounts for none of them being very long and for a Pixies gig, in full, blinding

flow, becoming a genuinely liberating experience.

And the Francis consciousness does seem to take its leave when it comes to writing songs, which for him is a highly mathematical mental exercise.

"It's neurotic, almost, like little games you play with yourself. You just say, Ooh, that's a neat little definition or rule, and you just keep limiting yourself, saying, These are restrictions A, B, C and D. And then you go to write your song. It's a lot easier, obviously, because you don't have the whole universe to draw from. All you can do is write X amount of words. Plus it's more fun, it's more of a game. It's like filling in a crossword puzzle."

In which case I must admit to getting one of 'Debaser's' clues wrong. When you say "I am un", I overinterpreted and took it to be "eye and moon", as in the film's opening image.

"Yeah, that's weird when you make up your own language — but everyone can still figure out what it means."

He laughs.

"There's no such thing as a *debaser*. There's the word to debase, debased, debasing — but no debaser. It's fun."

Any other films with Pixie potential?

"I have no idea, I would never even think like that. I would never think that far ahead about a song. I actually felt bad, or uncomfortable, about writing a song with the words 'un chien andalous' cos everyone's gonna think I'm some snotty, arty. . ."

Bastard.

Yup, careful Charlie boy, we wouldn't want anyone to think you was smart, like. But this is the brilliant Pixies conceit: they are smart enough to act dumb when required. One minute Charles is enthusing about Nicolas Roeg's 1973 film *Don't Look Now* after I suggest it would make a great Pixies song — "Actually, I've studied that a lot, it was one of the films featured in a course that I took" — while the next he's denying Pixies are anything special: "We can't even play our instruments."

Sure, you can't.

"Oh, we can *now* but what we do is. . . we're limited, we can't just go up and do anything other than the style we play in. It's just, like, really rudimentary. . . If I were to go through each song you'd realise how much we're just ripping ourselves off over and over and over again."

Are you quite happy to stay within your self-confessed limitations?

"Yeah, cos it's like we've come up with a few of our own little tricks or rules that identify us as a sound. So that's good. I'd like to get better. To be restricted initially and have to come up with something good is a good lesson. And then to become a good musician and remember simplicity. Cos for us, that's the best rock 'n' roll. We like really simple rock music."

"If you can get it down to one chord, a beat and no melody. . . that's the best song. If you can keep stripping stuff away and still have it be fascinating."

SURFER ROSA was a landmark album of the 1980s, a knowing rampage through rock's constituent ethnic parts played

back with everything turned up to eleven.

Such was the Steve Albini studio technique and, in retrospect, it seems the only way to follow it was by some blatant separation and toning.

"'Doolittle' sounds lighter but the songs are much harder than they are on 'Surfer Rosa'," comments Charlie. "I suppose it's what happens when you use a producer and you start spending a lot of money. You get things really balanced and nothing stomps out something else."

You don't consider that Albini produced 'Surfer Rosa'?

"Well, I've read interviews with him where he denies he produced it and, actually, I think he's a little pissed off at us that his name ended up on it as a producer. Although it's really his own responsibility to make sure that it wasn't like that in the end, I suppose."

"No, he produced it, sure. I mean, he only did it in two weeks, he didn't sit around and listen to the songs over and over, but he produced it. Those are his sounds."

There's still a good few culture clashes happening on 'Doolittle', though maybe less explicitly so than in the past.

"Yeah, definitely. We're not trying to fit in anywhere and we wouldn't do very well if we tried, either. We like lots of things. We like The Kinks and we like Tackhead, the whole gamut."

Pixies' cover version catalogue features The Beatles' 'Wild Honey Pie', Neil Young's 'Winterlong' and — almost inevitably, bearing in mind Charles' desire to strip rock music down to basics — The Velvet Underground's 'Jesus'.

"We always feel too pretentious playing that. So many people do Velvet Underground covers."

It helps bolster the Velvets legacy, of course, and suggests yourselves as part of that tradition.

"It's like rock music that anyone can play. EAEA," he thumps the table, "go like this, even the drums. Anybody can play it. I hate to say that it's like the music of the people but it comes off like that."

AFTER BLITZING Britain and then the continent, Pixies return here in June to appear at the Glastonbury festival. Now must that be a Pixie spiritual home or what?!

"Well, I found out afterwards that it was a real sort of green thing, but still a rock 'n' roll type of festival, which is fine. I mean, I got nothing against these things. I didn't want it to be this really heavy duty benefit, we don't like doing those things at all. We *don't* do them."

Because of the attitudes that surround them?

"Partly, but mostly because as a band we wanna be understood as only the Pixies and that's it. We have nothing against people's consciences but we wanna be a rock band and that's it! We wanna make cool rock. We wanna be like The Beatles! Or The Rolling Stones. We don't want to be connected with reality, we wanna be larger than life. And they are. Gigantic, in fact."

